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Abstract

University supported residence halls should make some significant contribution to the development of the individual resident. Programming in the halls ought to have three major objectives, three dimensions along which change should take place: (1) social-personal value systems; (2) receptivity and sensitivity to cultural experiences; and (3) general intellectual development. A two and one-half day training period was held to set the tone and emphasis desired for residence hall programming. The programming tactics are explained. Residence hall staff members were encouraged to assume an active role in planning and implementing programs for the halls. They no longer needed to depend on floor governments to initiate activities. Specific methods for resolving group tasks are described as is the generation of ideas, and program selection. Groupings on residence floors should take advantage of the natural six-twelve man friendship groupings, planning mainly for these groups and encouraging heterosexual groupings for programs. "Creative projects" are believed to be useful in helping students and staff to become more innovative and to have a greater impact on their peers. Through encouraged confrontation with the outside, growth in the three areas above is more likely. (Author/KJ)

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RESIDENCE HALL PROGRAMING FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT:
A Working Model

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Summary

The paper describes some general developmental goals and the programing tactics that were used to implement these goals for residence hall staff and their students.

Developmental Goals

Intellectual Growth. Programs and activities are described that have an impact on the intellectual life of students outside of the classroom. The focus is on the world of ideas and carries the student beyond mere grade-getting behavior.
Cultural Experience. The encouragement of efforts to bring the graphic and performing arts to the residence hall units, rather than to simply depend on student initiative in seeking out play productions, concerts, and art displays.
Personal-Social Values. The generation of programs that call the attention of students to contemporary social problems and issues, and the development of practical means of solving these problems. Finding ways of involving students in the world outside the academic ghetto.

Programing Tactics

The Staff Member as an Activist. Staff members are encouraged to assume an active role in planning and implementing programs for the halls. They no longer need to depend on floor governments to initiate activities.
Group Processes. Specific methods for resolving group tasks are described: the generation of ideas, selecting programs, the detailed implementation of programs.
Group Size and Composition. Groupings on residence floors should take advantage of the natural six to twelve-man friendship groups. Plan programs primarily for these smaller groups, encourage heterosexual grouping for programs.
Creative, Risk-taking Behavior. "Creative projects" were found useful in enabling students and staff to become more innovative, to have a greater impact on their peers.

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1968, members of the housing staff, Student Activities Office, Student Affairs, and the Counseling Service got together to design a training program for residence hall staff. We wanted to draw on a broad range of resource personnel to provide some new -- if yet undefined -- emphases for programming in the residence halls.

By way of information our residence hall staff consists of three levels of personnel. First of all there are the student assistants -- mostly junior and senior year undergraduates -- who are each responsible for a floor of approximately forty residents. Secondly, there are the graduate assistants. Drawn from various graduate programs, they are second in command to the third staff member, the resident director. The residence directors are professional men and women with individual responsibilities for a hall accommodating up to 550 residents. It was our basic task to take these staff members, and by utilizing a two and one-half day training period, set the tone and emphasis we wanted for residence hall programming.

Our initial supposition was that university supported residence halls should make some significant contribution to the development of the individual resident. More specifically, we decided that programming in the halls ought to have three major objectives, three dimensions along which change ought to take place. They were in the areas of social-personal value systems, receptivity and sensitivity to cultural experiences, and general intellectual development.

Some examples may be helpful at this point.

Social-Personal Values. Many students in Land Grant universities can and do spend four or five years in an academic ghetto that has little or no contact with

the larger community. We believed that it was important for students to be aware of the plight of their black brothers, their migrant laboring sisters, and to find courses of action and modes of effective response to the needs of these human conditions. Thus we wanted programs in the residence halls that would increase the awareness of our students to social needs, and other programs that would help students move out of the University and into the areas where these needs existed.

Cultural Experience. Our campus, perhaps like your own, contains a multitude of cultural resources that students utilize in very sparing fashion. Our Sheldon Art Gallery, Howell Theater, and musical organizations probably are supported by more people in the community than by students. Again, we felt that the arts -- graphic and performing -- should be a part of the continuing experience of the student. We wanted residence hall staff to bring these resources into the residence halls and if necessary to take the students to the resources. Art shows, experimental theater, and chamber music concerts might all be a continuing part of residence hall life.

Intellectual Growth. Perhaps the single most discouraging aspect of residence hall life is the extent to which students use their rooms as a place to retreat from any kind of intellectual discourse. Our students, again like many of your own, are well practiced in the arts of grade grubbing and psyching-out instructors. And it is not impossible for a student to go through four academic years without ever reading a book for his own personal pleasure and satisfaction. With used paperbacks selling at nineteen cents a piece, we saw no reason why residence hall floors could not have a library that could be loaned or swiped, and more importantly, read. Our faculty is loaded with part-time photographers, specialists in duck migration, ham radio operators,

Great Books discussion leaders, specialists in political revolution, and so on. We could see every reason why these resource people should become a regular part of dorm presentations and discussions.

To achieve any programing that would stimulate growth along these dimensions, we needed an array of tactics and strategies that could make the programing a reality. We needed to devise ways and means of getting our staff moving and involved. We needed to attend to some relevant aspects of student behavior that could facilitate or impede programing.

Harry Canon, John Winkworth, and Bob Brown are going to provide you with the rationale, implementation, and evaluation of these tactics and maneuvers that were employed in our short staff training period.

THE STAFF MEMBER AS AN ACTIVIST

Concepts

In the past, Residence Hall Staff Members have been encouraged to generate strong floor governments that would in turn be responsible for programs and programming on the floor. In general, the staff member was expected to have only indirect effects on floor programs and was reinforced for building, however he might, a strong and active floor government. Good residence hall staff, were thought to be those who lived on floors where there were lots of functions, many speakers and the like.

Not infrequently, a staff member who found himself on a floor where the elected officers were weak or inactive would be inclined to see himself as having done a poor job. Somehow, somehow, staff were supposed to covertly stimulate and manipulate the residents and their officers into some semblance of activity.

We very consciously altered the working model for all staff, and for the student staff in particular. Staff were told that they were to become active, plan programs themselves, implement activities, and see that functions were carried through to completion. In short, they were to model for their residents the kind of behaviors that all residents on the floor, including officers, would be expected to engage in. Operationally then, a staff member might sit down over supper with a group of students from his hall or floor, and plan some activity, using ideas any student might throw out or contribute. Then, the staff member would plan the details for consummating the program--contacting the speaker, ordering the film, or what-have-you in the company of several of the same students, thus giving them an opportunity to observe first hand just how such a program might be implemented.

The significant shift, then, is to place the staff member in a more active, planning role, encouraging him to assume responsibility for some initial programs and events on his floor. He or she were thus free to take direct action, to actively shape the thrust of programs for the floor.

Implementation

The primary objective of the training program was to acquaint the staff members with this new model of the activist. This was accomplished by having the training itself serve as a model for active involvement. With student staff expected to model appropriate behaviors for their residents, we felt it desirable that the experiences provided had to be positive and activity oriented, stressing participation and creative thinking.

In order to convey this positive orientation toward the activist role, it was felt that certain kinds of activities should be avoided. This included passive involvement, usually characterized by listening to speeches and panel discussions, as well as discussions revolving around the less desirable aspects of the job (i.e. the discipline and the paper work). We wanted to instill in them a real enthusiasm for the job, in a way that would make them more active and more effective on their floors.

The kinds of experiences in the training stressed the importance of the staff members becoming actively involved in generating programs which they could implement on their own floors. Small groups dealt separately with the social, cultural, and academic-intellectual areas of student development. Their tasks were to devise and plan programs in each of these areas, so that at the close of each group planning session, we would have a collection of programs that staff could go back and undertake on their own floors. Time here was an important

factor since they were given only a limited amount of time in which to work. It was hoped that these kinds of rigid demands would get them to engage in more worthwhile behavior, as well as getting them to concentrate on active program productivity.

Evaluation

The immediate impact of this staff orientation did serve to promote and strengthen the importance of program planning in the minds of the University of Nebraska residence hall staff. After less than two weeks of school, one-fourth of the staff had already initiated several programs and another two-fourths had plans for programs in mind. Over 80% saw the program initiator role as more important than being counselors of peace-keepers.

As might be expected, there were some differences among various groups of staff members. Experienced staff members, for example, took somewhat more of a wait-and-see attitude toward the program approach than did new staff members. At the same time, however, the more experienced staff had actually implemented several programs sooner than had the less experienced staff members.

Impressions gained from interviews with individual staff members suggest that with few exceptions most of the experienced staff felt either uncomfortable or ill-prepared for being a counselor, but planning, organizing and facilitating floor programs was a role in which they felt more comfortable and capable.

As the year progressed, staffs continued to be concerned about their role as program initiators. As might be expected, there was wide variation in the success of individuals fulfilling this role. Some remained active throughout the year, inviting in speakers and planning programs; others succeeded in getting floor members and floor governments to take the initiative, and still

others were frustrated after their initial efforts failed. The counselor-buddy role remained an important one for most student assistants, and rightly so, but for many the role of an active planner and programmer took on more importance and appeared to be one in which they felt comfortable, if not always successful.

Several hall staffs organized programs for their own weekly staff meetings. They carried on with their own program for self-development, often applying the techniques that had been modeled for them during the orientation.

GROUP PROCESS

Concepts

It seems a bit odd, given the current interest in grouping people, that we had so much initial difficulty in working out a model for training our staff in group processes. One ordinarily needs to turn over only several rocks on a given campus before an expert in grouping reveals himself. While we wanted staff to be sensitive, we were a bit disenchanted with sensitivity groups.

We elected to continue the emphasis on programming, and to look at group processes in the light of programs they might produce. Or put more directly, how do you get small groups to generate ideas, plan, and ultimately implement programs that are conducive to intellectual, personal, and cultural growth.

Thus beginneth the Action Group.

We felt that staff might best learn how groups work by watching each other working in small groups, and by making observations about facilitative and non-facilitative behaviors. The critical factor, we felt, was for each such small group to have a particular task to pursue, a particular problem to solve. For

each group session, we asked the participants to come up with programs that could be implemented on a floor of their residence hall. The problems then, were real, and the observations could be quite meaningful. If a group was unable to come up with a program or series of programs related say, to cultural enrichment, there was a genuine need to find tactics that would make the group productive.

Implementation

The program included activities designed specifically to provide the participants with information about how groups operate. Initial exercises centered around one group's observing another group dealing with a particular problem task. Seated on the periphery of the problem solving group, the observing group was instructed to focus on the kinds of things which seemed to facilitate or inhibit goal attainment. A critique followed during which time the groups would react as to the kinds of process things that went on. Later on in the session the same two groups reversed roles, and went through the same process.

Additional group process involvement came about through an exercise in consensus decision making. The NASA problem solving exercise provided the groups with a first hand look at the kinds of behaviors that are intimately related to group decisions.

The final activity relative to group process arose out of a difficulty which the groups seemed to have in generating specific program ideas. We were interested in finding out whether or not some additional forms of structure might not facilitate greater productivity. For the final task of generating a program in the cultural area, the groups were first instructed to engage in brainstorming for ideas. These ideas were to be written down by a member of the group but there was to be no evaluation of the ideas. Then, after a list

of possible ideas had been gathered, the group was to redefine and assess their ideas, paying heed to feasibility, and interest to the group. The next step was for the group to break down into pairs in order to expand on an idea of particular interest to each pair. They would then report back to group their program. In terms of the quantity and quality of the project ideas developed, this latter method appeared to be vastly superior to the earlier attempts.

Evaluation

In some ways this was one of the most important aspects of the staff orientation and the majority saw these aspects of the program as helpful and enjoyable. Some were fascinated by the chance to be an observer and watch how a group worked. For a number it was the first opportunity to observe a group from this vantage point. In their words, they learned "many little things applicable to any group situation". The fact that the small groups were composed of staff members from different residence hall complexes was a plus factor for many, as they saw this providing the possibility of a cross-fertilization of ideas from complex to complex. Several of the groups continued to meet and share ideas throughout the school year.

While the majority responded favorably to these efforts, this aspect of the orientation received more criticism than any other.

After interviewing numerous staff members and putting these reports together with written responses and reactions, I think there were a number of reasons why this was so. First of all, many student assistants are or were active participants in student and residence hall government. Many have been involved in work-shops and programs which have dealt with group dynamics. They were a little tired of being "psyched out" or "grouped". As leaders in

other settings, they were used to making quick decisions and carrying them out rather than working through a consensus decision-making process. Some felt handicapped by the time limits imposed on the discussions and the planning. Another difficulty was due to an uncertainty as to whether they were to react in the observer situation to the group process or to the quality of ideas which were elicited in the group.

This does not imply, however, that some training in working with groups was not important to staff members. As the school year wore on, knowledge about the process of forming groups took on a greater importance. Rather than the dynamics of group process, the staffs were more interested in how to help promote the formation of interest and task-oriented groups. They were asking, "How do you get interest groups going? Should I promote floor government and work with it or should I work around it, if need be?"

These questions were discussed during the staff orientation, but in future orientations they might well be given more attention.

GROUP SIZE AND COMPOSITION

Concepts

College students and student personnel staff have been hung up on numbers. Perhaps the most common way of assessing the success or failure of a given venture has been to count heads. The more people participating, the more successful the event.

Such an approach violates most of what you and I know about the behavior of people in general and college students in particular. Informal observations of students lead us to believe that they do most of what they do together in small groups of three, five or a dozen. Only very rarely do

students on a residence hall floor turn out in mass to do something that makes any real difference to the individual participants. John Winkworth picked up some hard data verifying this less formal observation in a study two years ago.

We felt that if we could encourage staff and ultimately convince students that they could have a successful program with six or eight participants, we might take a monkey of considerable proportions off their collective backs. The instructions to staff were to keep it small. Any given program, any event need be designed to appeal to only a small number of residents on the floor. With small groups involved, there could be more programs with greater diversity. And assessment by head-count was no longer expected or acceptable.

One other highly relevant variable was derived from observations made by Katz and Korn in No Time for Youth. Our students, and I suspect yours as well, have been largely unable to devise occasions and situations in which men and women can get to know each other as something other than sexual objects, prospective dates, or prospective mates. Encounters between men and women are at best high stress, pre-dating events. After an exchange dinner or some similar such event, the woman is inclined to assess her femininity on the basis of whether or not she gets a follow-up phone call for a date. And the male assesses his masculinity in terms of one woman's response to his request for a date. Dances and dinners, the most common heterosexual encounters, retain as their focus the superficial social niceties, the display of collegiate cool, and the ultimate goal of super-sexuality.

Implementation

Our concern with the concepts of group size and composition were communicated to the staff in two different ways. First of all the make-up of the groups in the training sessions reflected our small, hetero-sexual group emphasis. Group size fluctuated from about nine to eleven in each group. Men and women were equally distributed as were members from the various living units. In addition there was no differentiation as to position, with residence directors and their graduate assistants participating as regular group members.

The second means of communicating these kinds of feelings to the groups was by having the groups focus on generating program ideas for the small, hetero-sexual groups, as well as for the individuals on their floors. The grandiose, something-for-the-whole-hall-approach was discouraged. The stress instead was aimed at developing a wide diversity of programs, intended for different interest groups, regardless of size.

Evaluation

A number of residence hall directors felt that one of the outcomes of the focus on the importance of small groups was an increase in the number and variety of programs.

If we can trust the perceptions of residence hall directors and staff members, this appears to be what happened. At least in a number of halls, breaking the set that was concerned with numbers, freed staff members to attempt programs they might not have in the past. They were more likely to take risks.

An elaboration of the number and kind of small interest groups that formed in the residence halls would not necessarily include different activities from previous years or more. But there has been a noticeable increase in concern for the development of such groups. Residence hall staff seem more attentive to getting several photography bugs together and suggesting how they might contact the director or the union staff to find a spot for a dark-room. Some are more conscious of what they are attempting to do when they take one or two students with them to lab theater plays. Another is not disturbed, but delighted, when he finds an entire V-8 engine in a room which several students were disassembling, cleaning and reassembling in their spare time.

One of the major needs discovered by our efforts to evaluate this model was for basic descriptive data that can be used for comparative purposes from year to year. We need to know more about what actually happens on a residence hall floor, what activities the floor members participate in during the year and who plans the programs. If we are going to think of the residence hall staff as educators and program planners, perhaps what activity takes place on the floor should be a part of our assessment of the kinds of staff people we need and want. How many programs does a hall or floor have during a given year? How many are educational, cultural or social? Who plans them? How many students attend? One of our Residence Directors, Norm Snustad, has been working on this problem and has the beginnings of a questionnaire that will give us just this sort of information about residence hall life.

CREATIVE, RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR

Concepts

I think all of us felt that the most critical factor in working with our residence hall staff had to do with the ability of individual staff members to see themselves as creative persons. All the tactics and strategies devoted to group size and composition, group processes, and to an activist role for the staff member would be exercises in futility if the staff person were not turned on, and if he could not see himself as being capable of infecting others with his enthusiasm.

What seemed to be called for was some kind of controlled experience, perhaps in the context of the small groups we had formed, where he might be able to explore his own creative resources. An opportunity to experience some risk-taking, reaching-out venture that would be reinforcing.

Implementation

Critical to the active involvement of the staff members in the program planning aspects was the creative project. This was a task that was intended to allow them to use innovative approaches in the process of bringing a program idea to fruition. Very simply, each group was asked to come up with a pantomime, mobile, playlet, or similar experience which would elicit a strong emotional response from their audience. Further stipulations were that they would be willing to use their creative project with a group of residents as a basis for a discussion, and that they would have a little more than four hours to prepare their presentation. They were encouraged to be as creative as possible, using whatever materials they so desired.

The training session was planned so that the group projects would be the final item on the agenda. Each separate presentation was followed by a brief period of time, during which the entire staff membership was encouraged to share their reactions.

It is very difficult to capture the flavor of the presentations in writing. There were a variety of approaches. One group used pyrotechnics while another used silence. Another used a strobe light. Then there were candles, flowers, comments on hope midst oppression, reactions to college -- good and bad, body sculpture to readings from The Spoon River Anthology, and many more. Suffice it to say that the individual participants seemed to welcome the opportunity to discover their own creative potential to move people.

Evaluation

The most enjoyable and one of the most meaningful aspects of the orientation program for the residence hall staff was the process of planning and presenting the creative projects. When the projects were first proposed, some groups and individuals felt they were going to be "Mickey Mouse" crayon and construction paper affairs. Within a few minutes, however, real enthusiasm was evident and ideas began to flow as the groups closed in on the specifics of their own idea and presentation. The excitement mounted once a group had decided on a specific project and began to shape it. At this point the eight or nine individuals became a group and the identity and pride of the individuals rested now with their own group creative project.

The reaction to the presentations themselves on the part of the audience of other staff members and the presenters was one of awe and delight. Awe, because of the statements the projects themselves made. As one staff member remarked, "They gave us all many things to think about". Delight grew out of the sense of confidence and awareness of a new potential for creative action

which resided in them. As another commented, "It was a chance to realize some talents we might not have been aware of."

A number of the presentations were later presented on residence hall floors and to other campus groups. For most staff members, the process had clearly demonstrated how groups can work together and they saw the value of the experience. Most saw the worthiness of the end products, and only a few were not sure how the process or the projects related to their jobs. One skeptic stated, "I cannot accept the use of aesthetic experience as a mechanism for social experience."

A number of us who have worked with other campus groups, such as sororities and fraternities, have found this creative project technique applicable in a variety of settings and situations. On several occasions, the participants have been given less than an hour to think about, decide on and put together a project or presentation. Some of these have resulted in just as moving, if not more moving, presentations.

Our experience with this technique leads us to conclude that this is an effective method of stimulating interest and facilitating group unity. It also dramatically provides the group with an awareness that they can have an impact on the feelings and ideas of others.

TOWARD A MODEL RESIDENCE UNIT

As you have heard, the programing and tactics that began with our residence hall staff have been employed with a wide variety of student and staff groups during the current academic year. We have used portions of these approaches with a YWCA cabinet, student government officers, fraternity and sorority groups, residence hall officers, and other groups. We are planning a similar three day session for 400 residence hall officers from mid-West colleges and universities in late August. At that time, we hope to include some significant modifications in the earlier model that may be of interest to you.

Instead of grafting our programing on to the traditional residence floor government structure, we will suggest that students on a given floor be encouraged to cluster themselves in groups of from three to five two-person rooms. These clusters of from six to ten residents would form the basic unit for floor government, floor activities, and programing. As we see it, any floor-wide social functions, and governmental and housekeeping activities would be cared for by a coordinating committee composed of one representative from each cluster.

The members of a cluster would be encouraged to re-arrange their rooms along any lines that might appeal to them. If, for example, a four room cluster elected to set aside one room for study only, another as a lounge, and the other two as sleeping quarters, we would see this or any other reorganization as appropriate.

While students might first react to physical restructuring, our staff would be working at the cluster level to have each cluster spend a regular period of

time each week -- perhaps over a meal -- to brainstorm and implement programs for their particular cluster. We would hope that from time to time clusters might plan programs and events to which other cluster members, individually and collectively might be invited. Obviously, we would hope that information about programs of the different clusters might be exchanged at meetings of the coordinating committee or notices posted so that residents might attend those affairs that pique their interest.

In general, we see the cluster concept as approximating more closely the natural groupings that exist in most residence halls. By acknowledging and using existing patterns of association among students, there is less effort expended in the often futile attempt to "build a cohesive floor". With a number of clusters planning and producing programs, we should initiate a much broader spectrum of activities that are likely to appeal to a wider array of student interests and needs. And clearly, the level of floor activity should make it difficult for students to avoid confrontation with the world outside the residence hall. More directly, the desired growth in the areas of intellectual life, cultural experience, and personal values is more likely to take place.